

How We Kiss

privilege on the dance floor

It's not just what you know — it's what you never have to know. It's happening every day, at that party or park or potluck, when you can look like what you really are and touch who you really want to touch without feeling like you're violating others' expectations. It's never being forced to examine accepted ideas of gender and sexuality, despite their arbitrary nature. It's never having to realize that people are seeing you as something you know you are not.

Privilege is about safety and belonging. It lies hidden in identities and desires that don't need to be justified or defended or even spoken of, because they reaffirm the identities and desires of most of the people around you. Privilege is assuming, before you even get there, that your gender and your sexuality are welcome

and expected wherever you might want to go.

Cisgender⁷ and heterosexual privilege are written into the social world with bodies. Everywhere we go, we expect that men are men and women are women and that the most basic need of each is to touch the other. These expectations are in the air at every social event and party, and then when a body that has never wondered why it is male and a body that feels female beyond question kiss each other in the middle of the dance floor — lightning strikes.

In one searing flash, we all see living & breathing proof of what is normal and expected, and some of us are forced to remember that we aren't expected. Alienation and fear stalk queers everywhere we go in this straight world, and

we fall right into their traps when the straight boy bumps us out of the way as he rushes to grab his girl.

Queers can choose safety. We can hide, we can lie, we can be painstakingly careful to never “flaunt our sexuality in people’s faces.” If we pretend we aren’t what we are, if we never live out our desires and identities in public, we don’t have to justify them to the cis-hetero world. We can avoid being called out and ostracized if we only hold hands behind locked doors and if we stay quiet when cisgender women and cisgender men grope each other without even thinking that we might exist.

But when desires and identities aren’t expressed and recognized for what they are, they aren’t fully lived — and we demand nothing less than a full life.

What if there were a space where queerness was right there on the guest list, visible and realizable? What if we could take certain places and cut them out of the “straight” world, the “normal” world, even if only for a little while? What if any people could kiss and touch without even having to think about whether they might violate unconscious expectations, might make themselves unwelcome, might become a target?

At this party, we’re creating a safe space for people to be queer in, where there’s no normal and no deviation. It doesn’t mean that cis women and cis men can’t kiss here, but it does mean that all of us have to think about who might see us. It means that we take joy in each others’ bodies for hard-fought, joyful reasons of our own, not because everyone is cheering us on or because we’re fulfilling

the story of attraction and sexuality that we've been told since birth. It means that we don't let our actions, our bodies, or our physical presences claim the space that belongs to everyone. Hopefully it means the wildest, most celebratory, most thoughtful and intentional and generally-awesomest party ever.

Making a space where no one feels on guard, regardless of their gender and sexuality, won't be easy, because it requires us to think about each other's experiences more intensely than we've ever been asked to. The norms of cisgenderness and heterosexuality are so alluring precisely because they offer us the chance to live without thinking; the accepted social narrative does all the thinking for us, and we just have to fit people into their "proper" places. However, we can think, we can listen to

each other, we can be aware of the effect we have on others, and we can make each other feel like we belong; it isn't easy, and it means moving past what we know.

Be brave.

And thanks for coming to the party!

- F.I.E.R.C.E.N.E.S.S.

Friendly Insistence
on Emphatically
Reiterating Criticisms
of Externally Normal
Experience, Sexuality,
and Selfhood

? The term “cisgender” was born on the Internet in the 1990s and came into wide acceptance and scholarly use in the 2000s. It fills a crucial gap in our language when we want to talk about people

who are not transgender or not transsexual. A cisgender person has only ever experienced their subconscious gender identity as aligned with their assigned gender, and cissexual describes those whose subconscious sex has always been congruent with the physical sex that their docs & parents told them they were.

We could say “gender-normative”, which in our society is considered a synonym for “cisgender” or “cissexual”, but then that would be implying that there was an unmarked “normal” state of gender identity... and, um... well... you know what we think about that. So let’s take this cool useful prefix and put it to use!

For the language nerds: "cis-" is a prefix of Latin origin, meaning "on the same side [as]" or "on this side [of]" — as opposed to "trans-" which means "on a different side [from]" or "on the opposite side [of]".

*For further reading: **Whipping Girl**, by Julia Serano, covers all this territory & more in a collection of super readable essays. Highly recommended.*